



IMPORTANT DATES

November 11 - Veterans Day

November 24 - Thanksgiving

December 7 - Pearl Harbor
Remembrance Day

December 25 - Christmas

January 1 - New Years

January 13 - SBVA Meeting

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The Alabama Veteran

"Proudly Serving America's Finest"

VOL. 1 - ED. 5

FALL 2011

Colonel Robert L. Howard State Veterans Home Making Progress; On Schedule



State Veterans Home Coordinator Kim Justice and State VA Commissioner Clyde Marsh (center) look over plans with Sean Whitt with Williams Blackstock Architects of Birmingham

The sight of hundreds of construction workers and the sound of heavy machinery pouring concrete and laying steel are signs of progress for the Col. Robert L. Howard State Veterans Home in Pell City.

"We're happy with the progress," said Clyde Marsh, commissioner of the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs. We're moving about as fast as we can."

Eleven months of construction have included occasional delays because of inclement weather, but the home is on schedule.

Mark McGraw, project manager for Doster Construction Company of Birmingham, said construction lagged behind at the start because of rain, but because of weeks of dry weather, work has progressed quickly.

The home will be one of the nation's first with a neighborhood and

green-house design.

As Alabama's largest veterans home with 230,000 square feet, the facility will feature 254 private rooms, of which 174 will be skilled-care beds and 80 domiciliary units.

Each neighborhood will have two to three houses with 12-14 private rooms with personal bathrooms.

Veterans will be able to enjoy the convenience of dining in their own neighborhood, participating in recreational and social activities in the home's town center, or meeting with family and friends at the neighborhood sports bar.

"The facility will have the amenities of home in a community setting where veterans can live comfortably with the honor and respect they rightly deserve," said Marsh.

The home is expected to be completed by summer 2012. (See page 3)



Commissioner's Corner - W. Clyde Marsh

New Initiatives Benefit Veterans

I am pleased to report that your ADVA has had a very busy and productive fourth quarter assisting veterans and family members. In fact, I would dare say that we had a banner, or "A" plus year by increasing services for Alabama's 420,000 veterans.

Although our economy has not rebounded from the economic downturn, our Veteran Service Officers in the field, Claims and Headquarters personnel, were able to provide assistance, or access to services and provide needed benefits throughout the state.

Some County Veteran Service Offices have reduced hours and in some cases, are open fewer days due to personnel shortages. However, our Veteran Service Officers and Administrative Support Assistants are still providing access to services and are meeting the needs of our veterans at the county level. I commend you all for your herculean efforts and continued dedication.

We are fortunate to have a State Board of Veterans Affairs, led by Governor Robert Bentley and chaired by Dee Hardin, that never fails to step up and hit one out of the ball park when it comes to establishing new, much needed benefits for veterans such as the new Col. Robert L. Howard State Veterans Home under construction at Pell City, Ala.

Also, the same veterans service ethos applied when the board approved the first state veterans cemetery - specifically, the Alabama State Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Spanish Fort. Construction of the cemetery began October 18 and is expected to be completed by December 2012.

On the SBVA's behalf, I want to welcome Patrick Downing and Jeffrey Brown to the State Board of Veterans Affairs. Representing the Military Officers Association of America, on October 1 Governor Bentley appointed both board members to a four-year term.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has pledged to end homelessness among veterans by

2015 and continues to dedicate resources to achieve this goal. All state VA directors have agreed to assist Secretary of Veterans Affairs Erick Shinseki in this crucial objective.

The VA is working with the Department of Health and Human Services, the Departments of Labor and Education, as well as with the Small Business Administration to address the homeless problem.

The VA's comprehensive plan to end homelessness also includes preventive measures like discharge planning for incarcerated veterans re-entering society, supportive services for low-income veterans and their families, and a national referral center to link veterans to local service providers.

As a part of the drive to end homelessness, the Department of Veterans Affairs is launching a nationwide initiative, "Make the Call," to spread the message about its special programs to help homeless veterans and their families in our communities across the nation. I encourage families, friends and citizens in our communities to "Make the Call" and help prevent and end homelessness among veterans.

The VA has a toll-free number staffed around the clock by trained professionals to help homeless veterans and families at risk. The number is 877-4AID-VET, or 877-424-3838.

Another ongoing VA initiative is providing quality services to veterans suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) - the signature wounds of the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The VA has made the claims process easier for those affected by PTSD by no longer requiring veterans to provide documentation of the event that may have caused their stress.

VA's decision ends decades of focusing on documenting the stressor event, and now focuses on the delivery of medical care and benefits for veterans with PTSD.

Around the State

Col. Robert L. Howard State Veterans Home



Doster Construction Company of Birmingham began constructing the Col. Robert L. Howard State Veterans Home in January. Once completed, the home will cover some 27 acres.



The home's Town Center will feature plenty of natural lighting with a four-side stone fireplace. Town Center will offer veterans a place to hold community activities and social events.



The home will include a Hall of Honor from the home's entrance to Town Center. Display cases will adorn the walls with items that will honor veterans.



Each neighborhood will have a common dining room, living room and kitchen. Residents can visit other neighborhoods and dine at their leisure in other areas of the home.



The home will have 254 private rooms with an entrance foyer, private bathroom, closet space and windows. The home will have skilled-care beds, domiciliary and Alzheimer's units.



The home's exterior will offer an appealing design with a combination of stone, shingles and wood accents. The design promotes a residential, rather than an institutional, appearance.

Around the State

State Celebrates Veterans Cemetery with Groundbreaking Ceremony



Members of the State Board of Veterans Affairs take part in the groundbreaking of the Alabama State Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Spanish Fort

The Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs hosted the historic groundbreaking of the Alabama State Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Spanish Fort at the future site of the cemetery on Oct. 7. The ceremony officially marked the beginning of the cemetery's construction.

Governor Robert Bentley, Congressman Joe Bonner and Steve Muro, Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs, were among those who joined retired Admiral Clyde Marsh, commissioner of the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs, for the groundbreaking.

"Today is about proudly serving 'America's Finest' and paying the last act of dignity and respect to those who pledged their all to defend a grateful nation," said Marsh.

Hundreds of veterans and guests attended the groundbreaking.

"I've been waiting with great anticipation for this to come," said Mark Arnold, a veteran of World War II, the Korean War and Vietnam War.

"I don't know if any of us here will be buried here, but we know they will be veterans," said Arnold.

The veterans gave Governor Bentley a standing ovation, acknowledging his help in making the cemetery become a reality.

"We owe our gratitude to our veterans for their service and sacrifice for our country," said Bentley.

In August, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Veterans Cemetery Grants Service awarded Alabama \$7 million for the construction of the cemetery. During the ceremony, Muro presented Governor Bentley and Commissioner Marsh with the check.

The state VA awarded the construction contract to White-Spunner Construction, Inc. of Mobile. Walcott Adams Verneville Architects of Fairhope completed the cemetery's design in June.

The first phase of the cemetery's construction will include roads, traditional in-ground burial sites, in-ground cremation sites, columbarium niches, administration and maintenance facilities, and a committal service shelter. Construction began Oct. 18.

Congressman Bonner recognized the need for the cemetery for veterans in southwest Alabama.

"For some 49 years, South Alabama veterans have been without a final resting place dedicated to their service," said Bonner.

"When completed, it will be a stirring and fitting memorial to those who sacrificed for our freedom."



An artist's rendering of the Alabama State Memorial Cemetery at Spanish Fort

Around the State



Commissioner Clyde Marsh presents the Veterans Service Officer of the Year Award to Mobile County Veterans Service Officer Linda Jenkins

Mobile County Veterans Service Officer Recognized for Service

Although she doesn't wear the military uniform to work anymore, Lynda Jenkins hasn't stopped serving her country, state, or those who have served.

As the Mobile County's Veterans Service Officer, Jenkins oversees the daily operations of providing support and services to the county's 35,000 veterans. Jenkins was recognized for her service by receiving the ADVA's Veterans Service Officer of the Year Award at the District III picnic held in Gulf Shores.

Jenkins served over 20 years in the Army as a Military Intelligence Analyst, recruiter and with duties in other various assignments. After her retirement in 2007, she joined the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs as an Assistant Veterans Service Officer. Jenkins was promoted to Veterans Service Officer in 2008.

VA Assist Victims of State Disasters

Veterans with a VA guaranteed home loan, and who were affected by the April tornadoes in Alabama, and by Hurricane Irene along the East Coast, should contact the Department of Veterans Affairs to learn what help is available for disaster recovery, VA loan assistance, and help with foreclosure avoidance. VA borrowers in need of post-disaster advice or information should contact their nearest VA Regional Loan Center toll-free at (877) 827-3702.

The VA encourages holders of guaranteed loans in disaster areas to extend every possible forbearance to borrowers in distress through no fault of their own.

In the aftermath of the tornadoes that devastated communities throughout Alabama, many veterans and faith-based organizations offered assistance to those affected by the disaster.

Governor Bentley also established the Alabama's Emergency Relief Fund. For assistance, call the Statewide 2-1-1 Volunteer Call Center, or toll free at 1-888-421-1266. Information is also available online at the Governor's Interagency Faith-Based Initiative Website at www.servealabama.gov individuals can register to volunteer or provide a financial donation to the Governor's Emergency Relief Fund.



Mike Beird, ADVA District I Manager, opens the 2011 Supermarket of Veterans Benefits

Supermarket of Veterans Benefits Held in Huntsville

The Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs (ADVA) 2011 Supermarket of Veterans Benefits was held at the Marriott Hotel in Huntsville June 23 with the department's District I hosting the event.

The ADVA partnered with other agencies and non-profit organizations for a "one-stop-shop" opportunity for veterans to receive information and assistance in benefits such as health care, employment, VA claims, financial counseling, and a multitude of other services. The event was the second SVB to be held in Huntsville in the past five years.

The Supermarket of Veterans Benefits provides a service to the more than 420,000 Veterans in Alabama. The Mobile County Veterans Service Office hosted another veterans outreach event at the Fort Whiting Armory in Mobile on June 29 for veterans in southwest Alabama.

Around the State

Veterans Home Coordinator Named to National Post



Kim Justice, ADVA Veterans Home Coordinator

The National Association of State Veterans Homes (NASVH) has named Kim Justice of Auburn as regional director of the association's southern region. Justice, who serves as the state veterans' home coordinator for the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs, was elected to the national post at the NASVH's mid-year conference held in Burlington, Vt.

As director of the association's southern region, Justice will serve as NASVH's executive liaison for one of the country's largest veteran populations estimated at over 9 million and covering 14 states and Puerto Rico.

Founded in 1952, NASVH represents the nation's 25 million veterans by working closely with Congress, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and state governments to ensure former members of the uniformed services have access to quality and affordable healthcare. The association is also a clearinghouse for techniques and expertise in the care of veterans and the management of state operated veterans' homes.

In addition to managing the daily operations of Alabama's three state veteran's homes, Justice is overseeing the construction of the Col. Robert L. Howard State Veterans Home in Pell City. The \$50 million facility will be the state's fourth and largest veterans home. The home is expected to be completed by summer 2012.

The state VA currently operates three homes in Alexander City, Bay Minette and Huntsville.

Administrative Support Assistant Dedicated to Helping Veterans

Elaine Whatley of Opelika received recognition for her outstanding service to the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs by receiving the Administrative Support Assistant of the Year Award. Whatley serves as the ASA for both the Lee County and Chamber County Veterans Service Offices.

With over 35 years of service with the State VA, Whatley is recognized among her peers for her meticulous administrative skills and exceptional knowledge of VA



Betty DuBose, Administrative Support Assistant for the Macon County Veterans Service Office, is presented flowers by Marshall Smith, ADVA District III Manager, in appreciation for her 30 years of state service.

ADVA Honors Employee for 30 Years of Service

For three decades Betty DuBose has dedicated her life to serving veterans as the Administrative Support Assistant in the Macon County Veterans Service Office.

Before coming to the ADVA, DuBose worked as a manager's checks examiner with the Union Trust Company in Baltimore, MD. She holds a Certificate in Secretarial Science and an Associates Degree in Business Administration from Alexander City State Junior College.

District III Manager, Marshall Smith, said DuBose deserves the recognition for her many years of dedicated service in helping veterans and their families in the county.

policies and regulations.

In 2010, Whatley assisted a veteran with a VA claim appeal that resulted in the veteran receiving over \$78,000 in retroactive compensation benefits. Last year Whatley also assisted the two county veterans service offices in filing over 400 compensation and 300 pension claims. As a result of her efforts, veterans and their families in the counties received over \$53 million in VA benefits.

Whatley is active in the community and dedicates her time to helping organizations that provide services and support to cancer patients.

Around the State

State VA Commissioner Selected as Junior Vice President of National Association of State VA Directors

The National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs (NASDVA) elected State VA Commissioner W. Clyde Marsh as the associations new junior vice president for 2011-12. Marsh was elected to the position during NASDVA's annual convention held in Lincoln City, ORE.

"I want to thank NASDVA for giving me the opportunity to serve as junior vice president and to represent all veterans at the national level," said Marsh, a retired U.S. Navy Rear Admiral.

Established in 1946, NASDVA consist of top veterans affairs officials from all 50 states and territories. The association advocates benefits and services for veterans by working closely with Congress, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and with veteran service organizations.

Marsh has served NASDVA in various leadership capacities including chairman of the association's finance committee and as treasurer.

31st Commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps Salutes Desert Shield/Storm Veterans



Tom Gwaltney (left), thanks General Charles Krulak, USMC (Ret.) for his service at the 2011 Salute to America's Veterans

Desert Shield and Desert Storm veterans were shown that their service to the nation has not been forgotten in the two decades since the start of the Gulf War as they were recognized on the opening night of the Alabama National Fair on Oct. 7.

"Salute to America's Veterans" is a program dedicated to honoring military members past and present. Each year the program selects a different time period to honor, with World War II, Vietnam and Korean War veterans recognized in the past three years, respectively.

Tom Gwaltney, chairman of the program, said the salute evolved out of a military appreciation night, during which active duty and retired military members entered the fair for free.

"It's an outreach to the military, but we also wanted to do something to honor the veterans," Gwaltney said. "We wanted something that was focused on them."

Desert Shield and Desert Storm Veterans were the stars of the night and were presented with a coin showcasing their service.

Among those making remarks at the ceremony included Montgomery Mayor Todd Strange and John McMillan, commissioner of the Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries.

"This is a wonderful occasion," Strange said. "We honor our veterans who have given us our freedoms."

The featured speaker was Gen. Charles Krulak, 31st Commandant of the U.S. Corps and current president of Birmingham-Southern College.

"I love the youth of America," Krulak said. "They served in tough times, and I know what their hearts are like."

Krulak was appointed the commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps in 1995, and held that position until his retirement in 1999. He was also the commanding general of the 2nd Force Service Support Group at Camp LeJune, N.C., during the Gulf War.

"My command cut through mine belts in the early hours of the first day of Desert Storm," Krulak said. "It allowed massive tank formations, and three days later we entered Kuwait City."

Krulak said he "jumped on the opportunity" to be a part of the "Salute to America's Veterans," and was honored to speak to a crowd of veterans from various branches of the military. Charlie Robinson, who served in the Army from 1971 to 1994 and is a Vietnam and Desert Storm Veteran, enjoyed the program.

"It's more than an honor, it's very special to me and it means a lot," Robinson said. "To be shown appreciation, it lets me know that America is the greatest nation." (Montgomery Advertiser reporter Matt Okarmus contributed to this story)

Around the State

Alabama War Heroes Inducted into the Alabama Hall of Honor



Marion Military Institute President David Mollahan, left, James "Bucky" Walter, center, and Marvin Thomas helped induct two Alabama Heroes into the Alabama Hall of Honor

Osmond "Kelly" Ingram and Eugene Thomas Jr. - heroes who died in combat during two world wars - were inducted into the Alabama Military Hall of Honor on Oct. 28.

Ingram received the Medal of Honor for heroism Oct. 15, 1917, when he attempted to jettison depth charges aboard the U.S.S. Cassin during a search for a German submarine.

He was able to throw several overboard, but others exploded before he could dump them into the Atlantic Ocean. His effort helped save his ship, and he was posthumously awarded the nation's highest military honor.

Thomas died May 24, 1945, when his B-29 bomber disappeared over Tokyo Bay during the waning days of World War II.

The two were installed in the hall of honor on the campus of Marion Military Institute, where the Corps of Cadets marched in review on the parade ground and entertained friends and relatives of the inductees.

Retired Navy Rear Adm. Timothy McGee referred to heroism during the induction ceremony that was moved inside to the MMI Chapel due to the threat of rain.

"The brave have always defined what the rest of us wish to be, but bravery is misunderstood," McGee said. "It is not the absence of fear, but the will to overcome it."

No one related to Ingram could be located, so James "Bucky" Walter, commander of the Kelly Ingram Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 668 in Birmingham, spoke in honor of him. Birmingham officials honored Ingram years ago, naming the city's most popular downtown park for him.

"He was a common man who is finally getting recognition for what he did," Walter said.

Marvin Thomas III, who was born one month after his father was killed, has sought through the years to obtain more information about his dad's death.

"My mother said that the day I was born was the happiest day and the saddest day of her life," said Thomas, a history professor at Gordon College in Georgia.

His father, a native of Prattville, was awarded the Silver Star for bravery in Europe before returning home to become a flight instructor at Maxwell Field in Montgomery. He later opted for duty in the Pacific as the war began to draw to an end.

"He said his students were going to kill him so he might as well take a crack at the (Japanese)," said Thomas, who was joined by his wife, Denise, and several other family members during the program.

Thomas said his father had flown 12 B-29 missions when his plane went down over Tokyo Bay.

He said one of the crewmen survived, but the rest apparently were killed.

"Many pilots who survived but were captured when their planes went down were executed," said Thomas, who submitted his father's name for consideration as an inductee into the hall honor.

During his address at the chapel ceremony, McGee said awards and rewards were not in the minds of Ingram and Thomas the day they died.

"They were thinking about their shipmates and squadron mates," said the retired admiral. "Each of these men had the complete trust of those they fought alongside."

Alabama's Military Hall of Honor was established in 1975. Each year, military personnel who have distinguished themselves are eligible for induction. (Montgomery Advertiser reporter Alvin Benn contributed this story.)

Wreaths Across America honors fallen during holiday season

Since 1992, Worcester Wreath Co., in Harrington, ME, has provided fresh wreaths that are placed on the graves at Arlington National Cemetery during the holiday season. The tradition has spread to more than 670 participating locations, which has become known as "Wreaths Across America."

On Dec. 10, the Bessemer Civil Air Patrol and Blue Star Salute Foundation of Alabama will hold the third annual Wreaths Across America Ceremony at the Alabama National Cemetery in Montevallo. The foundation anticipates that 1,200 wreaths will be needed on the day of the ceremony. Lt. Gen. David S. Fadok, President and Commander of Air University at Maxwell AFB, will be the keynote speaker.

The ceremony will begin at 11 a.m. and will include the laying of a wreath for each of the military services, a rifle salute, Taps, and end with family members, friends and volunteers laying a wreath on each grave at the cemetery.

A sponsored wreath is \$15. If you would like to sponsor a wreath, visit Bluestarsalute.org, or call (205) 672-2887.

News to Use

Enrolling in the VA Healthcare System

To receive health care through the Department of Veterans Affairs, veterans generally must be enrolled. Veterans do not have to be enrolled if they: (1) have a service-connected (SC) disability of 50 percent or more; or (2) need care for a compensable disability. A veteran may apply for enrollment at any VA health care facility or veterans' benefits office at any time. There is no time limit. A form, "Application for Health Benefits," VA Form 10-10EZ, must be completed and can be submitted in person or by mail.

Make sure the application form is signed; otherwise, it cannot be processed for enrollment. Application forms can be obtained by visiting, calling or writing any VA health care facility or veterans' benefits office, or by calling toll-free 1-877-222-VETS (8387). Applications via the Internet are also available at www.va.gov/forms. For information on VA's comprehensive health benefits, eligibility and enrollment you can access VA at www.va.gov/healtheligibility.

For a new VA patient, not already enrolled, the application for enrollment will be generated automatically as part of the patient registration process at the first visit to a VA health care facility. After the veteran has enrolled, VA will send a letter from the VA Health Eligibility Center notifying the veteran of his/her priority group. However, this letter is not necessary to initially receive treatment. Check with the local VA health care facility if there is uncertainty about a veteran's enrollment status.

Once enrolled, most veterans will remain enrolled without further action on their part. However, certain veterans are required to provide income information to determine their priority level. These veterans will be mailed a VA Form 10-10EZ for completion on an annual basis for re-enrollment. Failure to update this information could adversely affect a veteran's enrollment status.

Companies Pledge to Hire 25K Vets and Spouses

A coalition of packaged goods companies has pledged to hire 25,000 veterans and military spouses over the next two years as part of White House initiatives to aid military families.

The massive hiring effort would supply one-fourth of the goal of 100,000 new veteran and military spouse jobs by 2014 set by the President's job creation initiatives. It could also provide a major improvement in unemployment numbers among young veterans, a population that has had prolonged difficulties finding post-military careers.

The companies making the pledge are members of the American Logistics Association, which includes 270 manufacturers such as Tyson Foods, Coca-Cola, Unilever and ConAgra.

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VA's Caregiver Services

Family Caregivers provide crucial support in caring for Veterans. VA recognizes that Family Caregivers in a home environment can enhance the health and well-being of Veterans under VA care.



Under the "Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act," additional VA services are now available to seriously injured post-9/11 Veterans and their Family Caregivers through a new program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers. VA is accepting applications for these services.

Who Is Eligible?

- Veterans eligible for this program are those who sustained a serious injury – including traumatic brain injury, psychological trauma or other mental disorder – incurred or aggravated in the line of duty, on or after September 11, 2001.
- Veterans eligible for this program must also be in need of personal care services because of an inability to perform one or more activities of daily living and/or need supervision or protection based on symptoms or residuals of neurological impairment or injury.
- To be eligible for the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers, Veterans must first be enrolled for VA health services, if not enrolled previously.

The program provides additional assistance to primary Family Caregivers of eligible post-9/11 Veterans and Servicemembers. Services for this group include:

- Monthly stipend
- Travel expenses (including lodging and per diem while accompanying Veterans undergoing care)
- Access to health care insurance (if the Caregiver is not already entitled to care or services under a health care plan)
- Mental health services and counseling
- Comprehensive VA Caregiver training provided by Easter Seals
- Respite care (not less than 30 days per year)

Application assistance is available at 1-877-222 VETS (8387).

VA Update

Secretary Shinseki Announces an Additional \$10.3 Million to Help Eliminate Homelessness

Eleven states will share more than \$10.3 million in grants to community groups to provide enhanced services for homeless veterans this year. This is in addition to the \$59.5 million in preventive grants awarded earlier this year.

"Homelessness is a national issue that will be solved at the local level," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. "VA is proud to partner with the community organizations that share our dedication to serving those who served this nation. They are pulling veterans out of homelessness and setting them on the path to independence."

VA Benefit Checks Go Electronic

VA benefits checks will soon be a thing of the past. The U.S. Department of the Treasury announced that as of May 1, anyone applying for Social Security, VA or other federal benefits will need to choose an electronic payment method because paper checks will no longer be an option.

Additionally, people currently receiving federal benefits by check, including payments from the VA, must switch to direct deposit by March 1, 2013.

The Treasury Department published a final rule in December 2010 to gradually eliminate paper checks for federal benefit payments. The resultant savings to taxpayers in paper and postage, says the federal government, will be about \$1 billion dollars in 10 years. "In addition to the taxpayer savings," says a spokesperson for the Treasury Department, "electronic payments are safer and more convenient than paper checks."

To service veterans without bank accounts, including those who are homeless, the Treasury Department is offering benefit payments via a debit card called the Direct Express Debit MasterCard.

Information about the change in the delivery of benefit payments, as well as application procedures, are posted on the federal Go Direct Website at www.godirect.org.

Assistance is also being offered by the U.S. Treasury Electronic Payment Solution Center for free at (800) 333-1795.

As a key component of VA's plan to eliminate homelessness among veterans, VA's Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem Program provides grants and per diem payments to help public and nonprofit organizations establish and operate supportive housing and service centers for homeless veterans. As a result of this funding, provided through a program known as VA Special Need Grants for Homeless Veterans Service Providers, 26 projects will receive approximately \$10.3 million to continue providing enhanced services for homeless veterans who are seriously mentally ill. The grants will also greatly benefit homeless women veterans, including women with children, elderly women, or those who may be terminally ill. Little Rock, AR and nine cities in California were recipients of the recent grant.



The Veterans Affairs Research and Development program is launching the Million Veteran Program (MVP), an important partnership between VA and Veterans to learn more about how genes affect health, to improve health care for Veterans.

In order to do this, MVP will establish one of the largest databases of genetic, military exposure, lifestyle, and health information. Research findings based on MVP may lead to new ways of preventing and treating illnesses in veterans.

Such findings may help answer questions like "Why does a treatment work well for some veterans but not for others?" "Why are some veterans at a greater risk for developing an illness?" and "How can we prevent certain illnesses in the first place?"

With the expected enrollment of one million veterans over the next five to seven years, MVP aims to be one of the largest databases of its kind in the United States.

The goal of the MVP is to partner with veterans receiving services in the VA health care system who volunteer to share their health information.

VA Update

VA Reaches Out to Veterans to Explain Changes to GI Bill

The Department of Veterans Affairs is reaching out to inform Veterans of recent changes made by Congress to the Post 9/11 GI Bill.

General Allison Hickey, Under Secretary for Benefits, said "The Post 9/11 GI Bill is incredibly important because it reduces the financial burdens of higher education so that veterans have an opportunity to achieve their education goals. VA believes it is important for veterans to be aware of changes to the GI Bill this year and learn more about how these changes may affect them."

"It's hard to believe how far we have all come with the Post-9/11 GI Bill the past two years," stated General Hickey. "Today, more than 37,000 students have received over \$11.5 billion in GI Bill benefits to help them take charge of their future."

Changes to the Post -9/11 GI Bill that became effective August 1, 2011 include paying the actual net cost of all public in-state tuition and fees, rather than basing payments upon the highest in-state tuition and fee rates for every state, capping private and foreign tuition at \$17,500 per academic year, and ending payments during certain school breaks, to preserve veterans'

entitlement for future academic semesters. Also, certain students attending private schools in select states can now continue to receive benefits at the same rate payable during the previous academic year.

Beginning October 1, 2011, eligible individuals will be able to use the Post-9/11 GI Bill for programs such as non-college degrees, on-the-job training, and correspondence courses, and they will be eligible to receive a portion of the national monthly housing allowance rate when enrolled only in distance learning courses.

VA is implementing the latest round of changes to the Post 9/11 GI Bill and has already begun processing fall 2011 enrollment certifications. Outreach by VA has helped to increase participation by colleges and universities in the Yellow Ribbon program, which helps students avoid out-of-pocket costs that may exceed the benefit. Today, more than 2,600 schools are participating in the Yellow Ribbon program.

"VA is committed to ensuring veterans have the information and tools they need to succeed," General Hickey concluded. For more information, call the VA's education hotline at 1-888-GIBILL-1, or go online to www.gibill.va.gov.

Nationwide Release Encourages Public to Join VA Culture Change

The Department of Veterans Affairs is taking its internal culture-change message to the public with a new video about the vital role women play in the military and the importance of providing women veterans with high quality health care.

VA's Women Veterans Health Strategic Health Care Group recently completed a 60-second public service announcement (PSA) that challenges viewers to rethink preconceived notions about women veterans. This dynamic video features images of women in service to our country: they drive supply trucks, participate in reconnaissance missions, walk safety patrols, and operate helicopter machine guns.

"When these brave women complete their service and become veterans, we want them to know that VA is there to meet their health care needs," said Dr. Patricia Hayes, Chief Consultant of the VA's Women Veterans Health Strategic Health Care Group. "At the same time, we want the public to recognize the contributions of women veterans and the benefits they have earned through their service to the nation."

The PSA is available for viewing on YouTube: www.va.gov.

The number of women using VA has doubled in the past decade, and that increase is expected to continue into the next decade.

More than half of the women using VA health care have a service-connected disability. These range from combat PTSD to missing limbs. The PSA gives a sampling of the service connected disabilities women veterans must cope with on a daily basis.

VA Debuts Documentary Highlighting Polytrauma System of Care

The federal VA has launched a campaign to increase awareness about Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and services provided by the VA for veterans and servicemembers recovering from TBI and co-occurring complex injuries.

The campaign debuted with a 25-minute documentary highlighting individual stories of recovery for some of the most severely injured and wounded veterans through the VA Polytrauma System of Care at the Hunter Holmes McGuire VA Medical Center in Richmond, Va. The documentary and other videos can be viewed at www.polytrauma.va.gov.

"The stories of true courage and determination are an inspiration to all who watch this documentary," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. "The stories go beyond their injuries resulting from combat or vehicle accidents by highlighting their heroic roads to recovery, aided by VA's system of care. I encourage everyone to take the opportunity to watch the video."

VA has released a series of products to promote awareness of TBI and services available to Veterans, including public service announcements, featuring Golden Globe, Emmy, and Screen Actors Guild (SAG) Award winner and Academy Award nominee Gary Sinise.

The pieces highlight the fact that affects of TBI can range from mild to severe, lasting for a brief or prolonged period of time.

Treatment is available and VA provides information about TBI and VA's Polytrauma/TBI System of Care is available at www.polytrauma.va.gov